HISTORY of ST. ANNE'S CHURCH, WALPOLE

1865-- 1976

The earliest event in the history of this area dates back to 1860, when the Explorer La Salle assisted at the first Mass offered in Dunnville by the Chaplain.

In the beginnning of the 19th Cebtruy, only a lone Missionary visited the district when Mass was said in private dwellings, often in Pat McLeavey's home on the 6th Concession, or at Heenan's on what is now No. 3 Highway.

The history of the Irish settlers in Walpole was practically the same as in the other parts of Ontario. They had to work hard, cultivating the land which was granted to them by the Government, and it is difficult to realize how they could make a livelihood under these adverse conditions. They built their homes, barns, and road, but without a Church, their community was not complete. Building a church to-day is merely a task for the Bishop, Parish priest (as they get an architect) and they must raise the money to meet the building expenses. These first settlers, however, had to do all this themselves without the assistance of a priest to organize the work. About 1864 the men of Walpole assembled to discuss the problem. Cornelius Devine was willing to donate a piece of his land bordering what is to-day No. 3 Highway and the Central Road as a site for St. Anne's Church.

To keep the cost at a minimum, the men drew bricks for their church by wagon all the way from Pt. Dover. Eventually, the church was erected about 1865. The present Sanctuary was added in 1895.

It must have been a joyful day for the parishioners and their Pastor, Father Michael O'Shea of Caledonia, who looked after the people of Walpole, when Most Rev. J. Farrell, first Bishop of Hamilton, dedicated the new building.

For some reason from 1874-to 1895 Walpole was a mission of Cayuga. After twenty years, Fr. L.M. Lynch took charge of St. Anne's church, and ever since it has been a mission church of Caledonia.

The people of Hagersville, at that time, attended Mass in Walpole, when weather permitted. They went out to Walpole in a conveyance known as a "bandwagon," which they rented from the Livery stable. As time passed, Hagersville Catholic population increased, and the church in Walpole proved to be entirely too small for the growing congregation. For this reason, the parishioners of Walpole added the Sanctuary to their church. This was completed in 1895.

Here we can properly state that the close relationship between St. Anne's, Walpole, and St. Mary's, Hagersville, dates back to those very early days and to the time when both were missions of Caledonia, with the same self-sacrificing Priests alternating saying Mass in both places. So, this explains the present day spirit of co-operation among the members of these two churches. Later, the first St. Mary's church was built in Hagersville in 1914 or 1915.

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